

The Nature
Conservancy



Hawai‘i and Palmyra



Ha‘iloa‘a
Finding Solutions



An aerial view of the West Maui coastline © Lyle Krannichfeld



© Elyse Butler

With ho’oilo, the rainy season, upon us, I’m thinking about how rainfall has declined in many areas of Hawai’i. It’s one of many ways climate change has impacted our islands. Over the past 30 years, 90% of the state received less rainfall than it did a century ago, coinciding with a dramatic increase in wildfire prevalence. This exposure became heartbreakingly clear when on August 8, 2023, we witnessed the entire town of Lahaina destroyed by fire.

For our fall newsletter cover story, we mark the one-year anniversary of the Lahaina fire by sharing how our conservation community is helping generate collaborative partnerships to mitigate fire risk and support recovery. The tragedy serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges we face to safeguard our ‘āina, our people, and our way of life.

But there are many ways to prevent or minimize fires in the future, as well as improve how we care for our islands today. This is why we titled this newsletter ha’i’loa’a, or finding solutions. At The Nature Conservancy, we are particularly interested in tools that help people and nature adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change.

One key strategy in this work is restoring degraded lands and coral reefs and scaling this work across watersheds and islands. We also protect and restore our native ecosystems to build nature’s resilience. This resilience is the capacity of nature, from corals to forests, to respond to a disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly.

In places like West Hawai’i Island and Lāna’i, we are uplifting restoration by strengthening partnerships. To learn about the progress we’ve made working with local communities to grow and replant corals in West Hawai’i, look for the link to a recent webinar in our Philanthropy Desk. In a Conservation Brief, we showcase our work on Lāna’i to conserve a rare dryland forest with support from community members and leaders.

Finally, we share a particularly heartwarming story of rewilding a species: Our team successfully translocated nine sihek (Guam kingfisher) chicks to Palmyra Atoll. Extinct in the wild in their native Guam due to invasive brown tree snakes, these rare birds now have a chance to thrive in a predator-free environment, thanks to years of conservation investment.

Whether we are preventing the extinction of a specific species or reducing specific threats such as land-based pollution, we center partnerships focused on mauka to makai thinking and action. But none of this work would be possible without the dedication of our staff and you, our supporters. In this issue, we welcome our new External Affairs Director and three new trustees, whose diverse expertise and passion for conservation will contribute to our ability to bolster our own—and nature’s—capacity to flourish.

As we transition into the Makahiki season—a time of peace, rest and gratitude—I want to mahalo you for joining our efforts to mālama ‘āina.

Mālama,

Ulalia Woodside Lee

The Nature Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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The Nature Conservancy Hawai’i and Palmyra chapter is the local affiliate of The Nature Conservancy, an international, non-profit organization based in Arlington, VA.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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Cover: A native plant thrives on once-fallowed land through the efforts of Kaiāulu Initiatives, a nonprofit organization dedicated to replanting and reforesting Lahaina. © Chris McKeown/Kaiāulu Initiatives

CONSERVATION IN BRIEF

SIHEK RETURN TO THE WILD AT PALMYRA

TNC’s Palmyra Atoll Preserve is home to some special new residents. On Aug. 28, nine sihek (Guam kingfishers) raised in U.S. zoos arrived at Palmyra, marking the species’ first return to the wild since 1988. Endemic to Guam, sihek were driven to extinction in the wild by invasive snakes. Palmyra provides a safe haven for sihek, charting a path toward an eventual Guam reintroduction. Our staff and volunteers have diligently prepared for the birds’ arrival, surveying potential food sources like geckos and insects, and constructing aviaries where the sihek will live for the first month. After release, the sihek will be closely monitored by a TNC-led field team. With this innovative conservation strategy, sihek will become a beacon of conservation optimism for other extinct-in-the-wild and threatened species.



Sihek chick at quarantine rearing facility at Sedgwick County Zoo © Thomas Manglona/KUAM



Adult male sihek at Guam Department of Agriculture Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources © John Ewen

LĀNA’I SPOTLIGHT

TNC established Kānepu’u Preserve on Lāna’i in 1991 to conserve a rare dryland forest where an abundance of endemic plants is found. The 590-acre preserve (three-and-a-half times the size of Disneyland!) is home to trees such as lama, olopua and ‘ōhi’a, and the fragrant endemic gardenia, or nānū. These forests face enormous threats from climate change, invasive species and wildfire. To address these issues, terrestrial field staff construct deer-proof fencing, maintain fire breaks and control invasive weeds. Our marine team collaborates with community groups to monitor the health of nearshore waters; in June, they conducted coral reef and fish surveys around the entire island—a first for Lāna’i. By increasing our work with community and partners, we are restoring health and connection to the preserve and island.



Alaha’e wood has many traditional uses. © Kerri Fay/TNC



‘Iliahi, an endangered sandalwood tree © Kerri Fay/TNC



Demand for wood from the ‘Iliahi tree (pictured fruiting) caused a huge decline in the species. © Kerri Fay/TNC



© David Wood

E KOMO MAI

We welcome Kainan Miranda as our new Director of External Affairs. Miranda returns to Hawai’i after serving in Washington, D.C., as senior policy adviser for natural resources and conservation to Hawai’i Congressman Ed Case. In his position at TNCHP, Miranda will help further conservation policies through direct interaction with elected officials, government agencies and others. Miranda has a proven track record of success at the federal level. He stewarded Congressman Case’s efforts to enact legislation such as the Coral Reef Conservation Act reauthorization and the Ka’ena Point National Heritage Area Act, as well as advanced efforts to study whether to establish a National Forest in Hawai’i. His leadership in expanding protections in Papahānaumokuākea and the Pacific Remote Islands demonstrates his dedication to preserving Hawai’i’s natural heritage for future generations.

Lahaina Fire

—One Year Later

Lahaina Mala runoff after the fire © Mark Deakos



West Maui water quality testing
© Tova Callender



Joe Imhof of Haleakalā Biochar holds a handful of biochar. © David Wood/TNC

Lahaina, the traditional name for Lahaina, once thrived as a remarkably lush place that supported a vibrant people. Fed by an aquifer and 11 perennial streams, the former seat of the Hawaiian Kingdom flourished as a wetland ecosystem. Fresh water shone and gurgled everywhere—in canals, streams and lo'i kalo (wetland taro patch), and in a fishpond known as Loko O Mokuhinia.

But on August 8 last year, most of Lahaina burned to the ground. Desiccated fields choked with non-native weeds, sparked by downed powerlines, and stoked by ceaseless winds doomed the town. Even the boats in the harbor burned.

Maui has need for some long-range thinking and collective action to address the confluence of land use, development, stream diversion and climate change issues that contributed to this tragedy. The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i and Palmyra (TNCHP) has joined efforts to address this need to solve problems in a way that benefits people and nature.

During this year of wildfire recovery, TNCHP co-convened the All Hands Environmental Response Network (or All-Hands Hui), a collaborative space for community groups, researchers and agencies to find synergies and support for better

environmental and community outcomes following the August 2023 fires. TNC's Kim Falinski worked with Maui conservation leaders Tova Callender of West Maui Ridge to Reef Initiative and Mia Comerros of the Water Resources Research Center to gather nearly a hundred entities whose work focuses on conservation and protection of natural resources.

"The Hui met weekly following the fire, and still meets regularly," says Tamara Farnsworth, TNC's Coastal Resilience Project Manager. "Everyone was invited, from community members to government agencies like USGS, DOH, FEMA. The County, too. In the first months after the disaster, we strengthened partnerships, providing a space for people to plug in, share data and offer services for the recovery."

Kerri Fay leads TNC's Maui terrestrial team. She reports that her team and other conservation organizations have doubled down on wildfire prevention with plans to improve access to wilderness areas, support partners to establish more effective green breaks between residential areas and forests, and even collect and distribute native seeds to help with recovery. Maui has woodlands of conifer and other non-native trees; here the terrestrial team is reducing "ladder fuels"—young

trees that allow fire to leap into the canopy. They are exploring the "biochar" process, which uses a kiln to transform these ladder fuels into additives for soil that promote plant growth.

The August 8 fire turned Lahaina into ash and debris. What effect did this have on the nearshore seawater and the reef? TNC's Maui Marine Team worked with Hui O Ka Wai Ola—a collaborative partnership between TNC, the Maui Nui Marine Resource Council, and West Maui Ridge to Reef Initiative—to monitor Maui's nearshore waters. TNC's Alana Yurkanin chairs the group that guides a committee of volunteers—"citizen-scientists rigorously trained to collect data"—at designated sites. These volunteers measure water's turbidity, temperature and chemistry. Alana calls this work critical, as the team is sampling right off the shores of Lahaina and Olowalu.

As of today, some 320,000 tons of potentially toxic waste (including arsenic, lead, cobalt and copper) has been hauled from the burn site to an excavated site near the reef at Olowalu. This "temporary debris storage" site has raised environmental concerns from the Maui public. So far, no elevated levels of

nutrients, heavy metals, volatile organic compounds or bacteria in the nearshore waters of Lahaina or Olowalu have been detected, and monitoring is planned to continue.

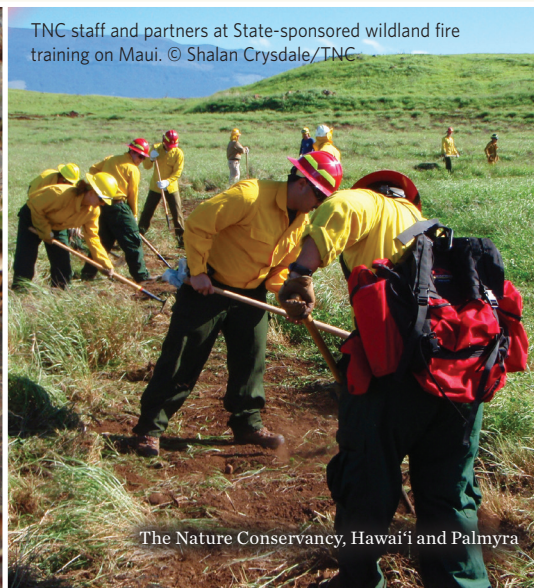
The winds on August 8 kicked up fires not only in Lahaina but also on three portions of the slopes of Haleakalā. Kula was hardest hit; 19 houses and dozens of other structures burned down, and many others suffered from smoke damage.

In post-fire Maui, landowners will need to focus on large-scale restoration and management with particular attention on former ag land. This means using a comprehensive set of firewise solutions such as green breaks, wetland and forest restoration, and strategic grazing. Above all, it's going to take collaboration on a vast scale with all who care for the island.

Kainan Miranda, TNC's external affairs director in Hawai'i, states the situation succinctly: "We can't afford to wait 10 years to figure this out. Fire has become a galvanizing factor in what we have been advocating all along—building resilience in our communities and meeting our collective responsibility to the land."



TNC field staff spray down hot spots at Kona Hema's 2009 lightning strike fire. © Shalan Crysdale/TNC



TNC staff and partners at State-sponsored wildland fire training on Maui. © Shalan Crysdale/TNC

The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i and Palmyra



Mesonet station at 4,200' provides real-time weather conditions online. © Shalan Crysdale/TNC



Removing invasive pines in TNC's Waikamoi Preserve © David Wood/TNC

nature.org/HawaiiPalmyra

Celebrating Legacy Club Members

Mahalo to our Legacy Club members for their commitment to the future of our natural world!

This year, we were delighted to reinstate our Legacy Club luncheon in April, celebrating Earth Month. Nearly 100 members gathered to catch up with old friends, make new ones and learn about Kanu Ko’a (“Planting Corals”), the first community-led coral reef restoration project on Hawai’i Island.

We are proud to have more than 350 Legacy Club members in Hawai’i and more than 30,000 globally. Mahalo to those listed below, who recently made a legacy gift to TNC in their will, trust, retirement plan or other estate plans.

Honoring their vision and generosity to help safeguard Hawai’i’s lands and waters for years to come, we will plant and dedicate a rare native loulu palm (*Pritchardia schattaueri*) in Kona Hema Preserve on Hawai’i Island.

Interested in joining the Legacy Club? Contact Lara Siu at (808) 587-6235 or lsiu@tnc.org.

Del Adlwan

Jack D. Brenton and Patricia J. Crandall

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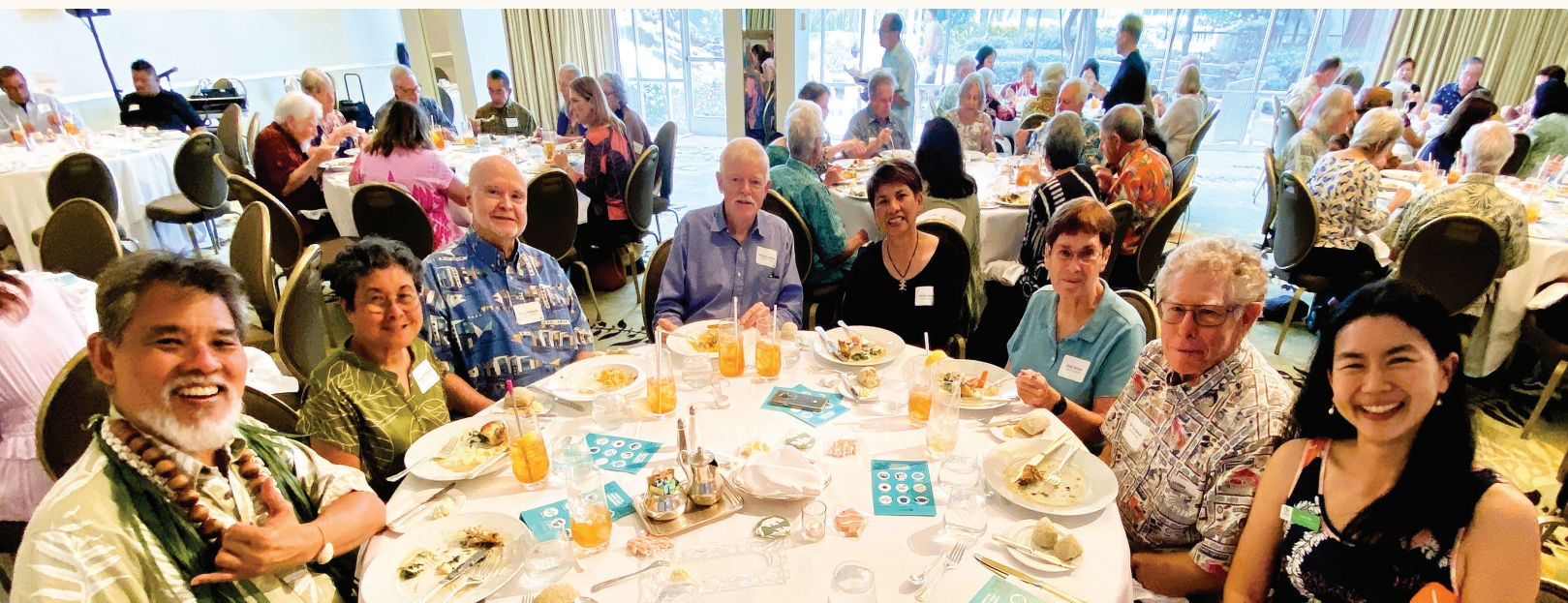
Dr. Ken Robbins and Dr. C. Tana Burkert

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Dr. Ken Robbins & Dr. C. Tana Burkert

Marlene A. Wenger

Legacy Club luncheon © TNC



Restoring Coral Reefs in West Hawai’i

Recent ocean heatwaves in Hawai’i resulted in a loss of 30% of live coral across the state, with some areas declining as much as 90%. TNC is revitalizing damaged reefs, using different techniques to determine the methods that will provide the best results.

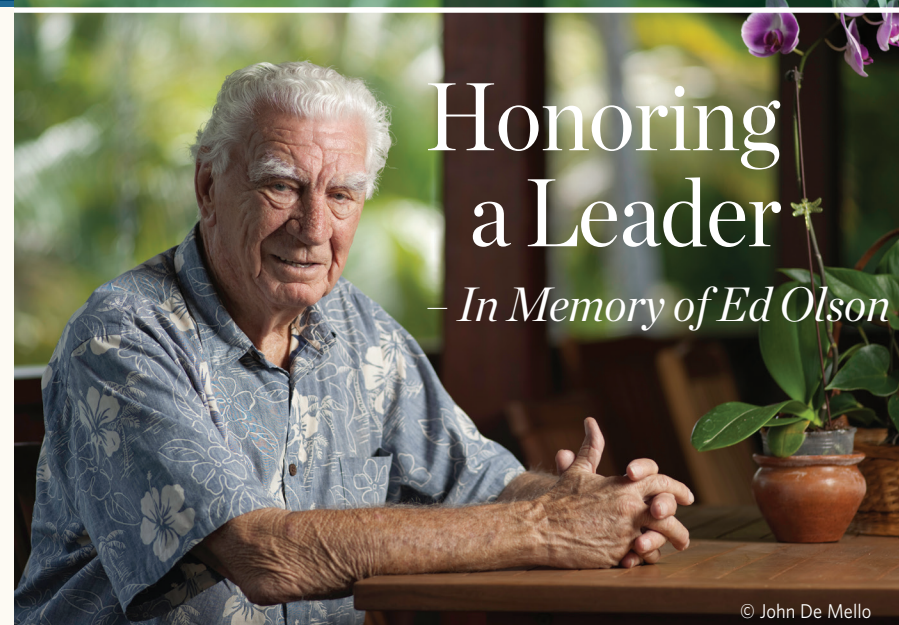
Kanu Ko’a, the coral restoration project in West Hawai’i Island, is a collaboration between TNC and community partners to replant corals and monitor reef health.

In a webinar about the project (scan QR code below), Rebecca Most, Hawai’i Island Marine Program Director, and Julia Rose, Coral Restoration Program Manager, share some of the tools and approaches TNC uses to support community-led restoration and how they may be used to restore coral reefs impacted by climate change.



Honoring a Leader

– In Memory of Ed Olson



© John De Mello

TNC is incredibly fortunate to build lasting relationships with amazing people whose philanthropy brings about significant, positive changes in Hawai’i. Ed Olson was such a person, and his passing in July 2024 touched many people. His caring and thoughtfulness for the community and the land was felt throughout Hawai’i Island. TNC’s Hawai’i Island forest Program Director, Shalan Crysdale, humbly believes that Ed’s gift to the program came at the time when it was needed most.

In 2011, the economic downturn forced many conservation organizations across the islands to scale back their projects and staff—and TNC was no different. Shalan shared that “our teams are our greatest asset, with decades of knowledge of native species between them, as well as the many community connections. It was a difficult time.”

The downturn caused the consolidation of the Hawai’i Island program offices, requiring a relocation closer to the preserves and laying off valuable staff. Shalan remembers talking with Ed right after this transition. Ed shared that he had some profitable investments and wanted to make a financial contribution to ensure the health of the forests TNC manages. He fully understood the importance of forests supplying fresh water to the communities. Ed’s donation provided critical staff support and helped sustain TNC’s Ka’ū Preserve that lies on the southeast flank of Mauna Loa, a location rich in native plants and forest birds. This area is part of the largest and most intact expanse of native forest in the state, yet encompasses many landowners.

Years earlier, when former sugar lands adjacent to the Preserve were up for sale, Ed purchased them and collaborated with TNC staff on how to best conserve the property. He understood that this land would help grow and safeguard the continuity of the native forest into the future. Ed also sold access easements to the state, known locally as “Olson forest access.” In doing so, he ensured community accessibility to various forest areas in perpetuity. Ed’s legacy of providing people a connection to nature ranges from community parks to coastal access.

His care for people has touched TNC’s field program through Lori Lorenzo, TNC’s Ka’ū field coordinator. “In many ways, Lori is with TNC because of Ed. Lori’s father works for one of the Olson businesses, and Lori received an educational endowment that Ed provides for his staff’s families,” shares Shalan. Lori’s education led her to apply for an internship with TNC to gain experience in conservation. In a sense, Lori’s education and now stewardship of the



Olson pasture lands with TNC’s Ka’ū preserve at top left on Mauna Loa © Shalan Crysdale/TNC



Volunteers and TNC staff rest after pulling weeds at Kaiholena, Ka’ū preserve. © Nohea Ka’awa/TNC



Ka’ū students learn about their native forest and watershed at Kaiholena, Ka’ū preserve. © Nohea Ka’awa/TNC

TNC staff complete a fence check in TNC’s Ka’ū preserve. © Nohea Ka’awa/TNC

preserves completes the circle back to Ed’s community-minded values and ethos for safeguarding the lands.

Shalan sums up his thoughts by remembering his many years of knowing Ed: “Someone from any background can contribute to securing the future of a place, and in many places on Hawai’i Island, Ed brought in the hail-Mary pass that saved them.” TNC is honored to have collaborated with such an incredible person whose business choices elevated both people and nature.



Welcome New Trustees



Dan Dunn was an investor with Crosslink Capital in San Francisco before becoming a high school economics teacher. His memory as a 10-year-old, snorkeling the reefs in Hawaiʻi, inspires him as a trustee. The awe of seeing the incredible marine diversity is his impetus for prioritizing reef conservation today.



Jan Elliott is an environmental advocate focusing on Hawaiian marine and terrestrial ecosystems. She manages several hundred acres of environmentally, culturally and agriculturally important land in the Hāna area of Maui, where she has spent much of her life. She is a 25-plus year trustee of the National Tropical Botanical Garden, a founding member of Nā Mamo o Mūʻolea and the Hāna Limu Festival, and has served on other environmental and cultural boards.



John Sabas is the Director of Public and Governmental Affairs at the law firm Carlsmith Ball LLP and former general manager for Community Affairs at Molokaʻi Ranch. Born and raised on Molokaʻi, he is honored to be part of a team that prioritizes caring for the land and its people.